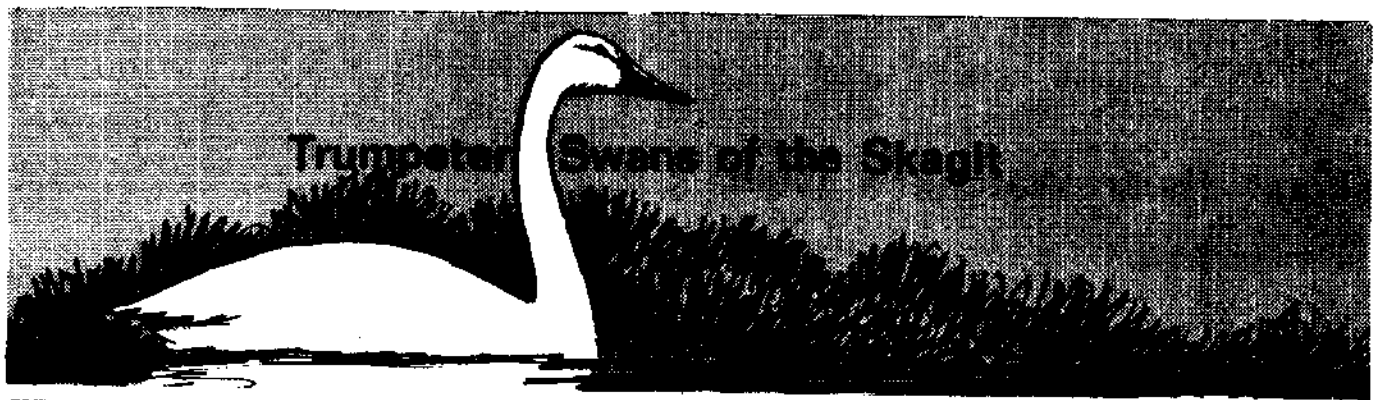


****ATTENTION****

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Each winter, a population of Trumpeter Swans take up residence in the lower Skagit Valley of northwest Washington. From their arrival in November until March, when they depart for their northern nesting grounds, the Skagit Trumpeters are a principal attraction for bird-watchers, photographers and other wildlife enthusiasts.

As recently as 1940, the Trumpeter Swan appeared to be on a collision course with extinction. More than a century of unrestricted market-hunting on their breeding grounds is believed to be the major cause of the Trumpeter's brush with oblivion. Swan plumage brought high prices on the European market and Hudson Bay Company records document the shipment of thousands of Trumpeter skins each year during the 1800s.

By 1900, it was generally recognized that, unless effective action was taken, the Trumpeters would soon vanish completely. This alarm resulted in the enactment of protective legislation by the United States and Canada. Through these new laws, the swans were given complete protection and a program of habitat protection was instituted. By 1960, the Trumpeter population had recovered sufficiently to be taken from the endangered species list.

Trumpeter Swans were first identified in the Skagit Valley in 1963. Prior to that time, swans that were observed in the area where the Trumpeters now spend their winters were thought to be the more common Whistling Swans. So, it's impossible to say for sure just how long the once rare Trumpeters have been returning to the Skagit. It is a matter of record that the Skagit Trumpeter population has grown dramatically since it was first identified. From the 20 that were observed in 1963, the Trumpeters have increased annually with the most recent counts showing more than 100 of the big white birds making the Skagit their winter home. That's more Trumpeters than were known to exist in the world just a few decades ago!

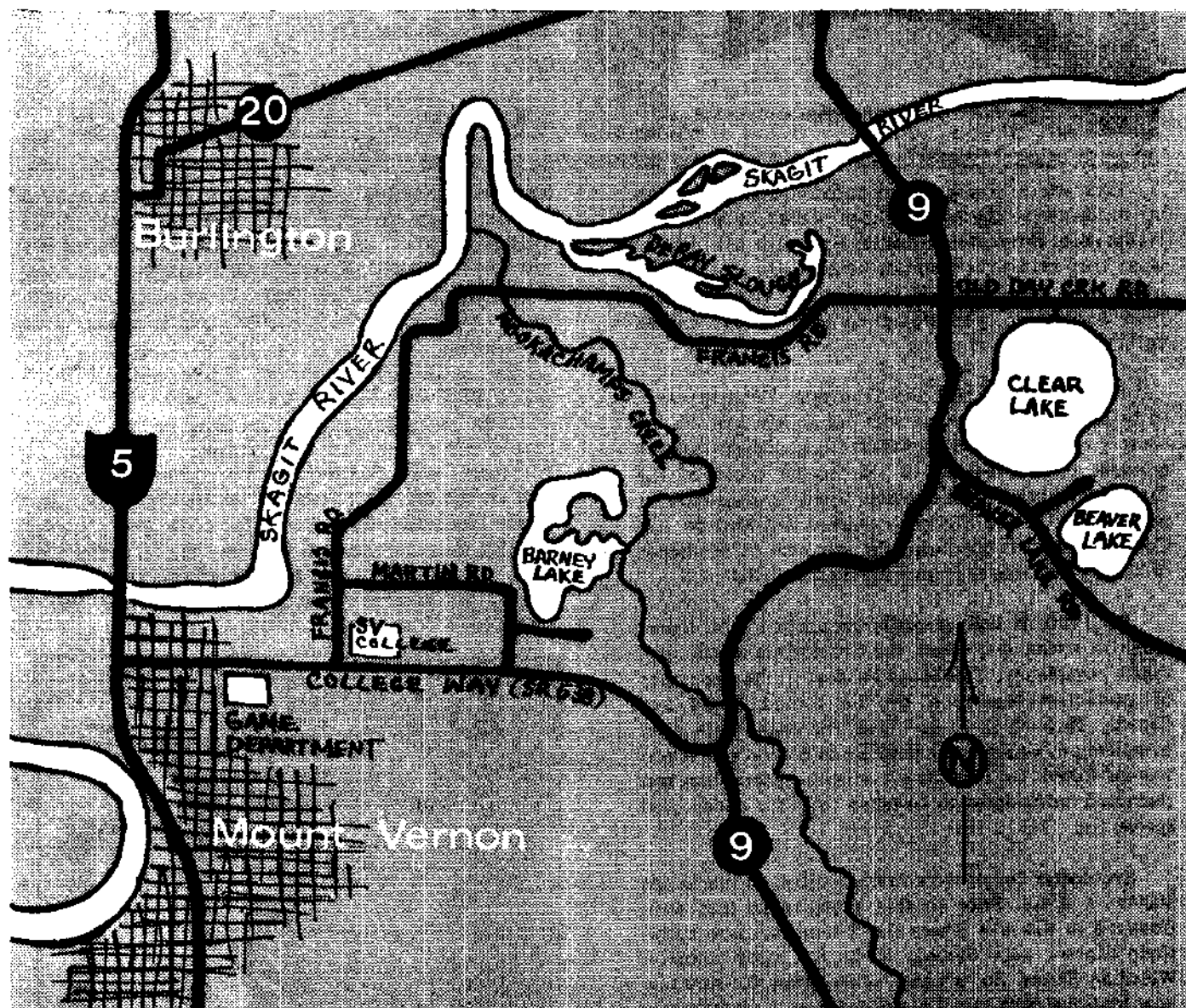
Trumpeters and their more common, look-alike cousins, the Whistling Swans, both winter in the Skagit Valley and it can be difficult to tell them apart. They're both large, long-necked white birds with black bills, legs

and feet. Immature birds of both species are grey with pinkish bills and yellowish legs and feet. Adult Trumpeters are slightly larger than Whistling Swans but not enough larger for size to be a reliable identifying characteristic. There are two characteristics that are more dependable but you'll have to make your examination at close range or use binoculars or a telescope. The Trumpeter has a pale red edge that's visible along the rim of the lower mandible. This appears as a thin, red stripe between the upper and lower halves of the closed bill. This red 'grin line' is absent in the Whistling Swan. Another identifying mark is a yellow spot on the bill, just forward of the eye on the Whistling Swan. Trumpeters never have this yellow spot. If a swan has this marking, you can be sure that it's a Whistling Swan but since it is occasionally missing on Whistling Swans, its absence isn't proof-positive that you're looking at a Trumpeter.



Another way to distinguish the two swan species is by the sounds they make. The call of the Trumpeter is a low, melodious, two-note trumpeting while the Whistling Swan makes a sound that's similar to the call of the Canada Goose.

Skagit Swan-Watcher's Guide . . .



During the winter and early spring, Trumpeter Swans can be found in the Clear Lake-Nookachamps area northeast of Mount Vernon. Unlike the Whistling Swans which do much of their feeding on dry land, the Trumpeters spend nearly all of their time in or near the water where they forage for plants that grow beneath the surface and along the shoreline. Clear Lake, Beaver Lake, Barney Lake and DeBay Slough are the most productive swan-watching locations in the Trumpeter area. (The public fishing areas on Clear Lake and Beaver Lake are good observation points.) When the Skagit River and Nookachamps Creek overflow into adjacent pasture and cropland, the Trumpeters will move into these flooded fields and, at times, may be somewhat more difficult to find. Another Trumpeter area is Judy Reservoir which is located approximately two miles east of Clear Lake on the Old Day Creek Road. And Trumpeters may also be found occasionally in the fields between Highway 20 and the Skagit River in the area east of Burlington.

